

Claims

1. A transaction management system for managing the purchase of a service by a buyer from a seller, the system comprising:

5 a data store for storing seller data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers:  
a seller identifier;  
a seller grade dependent on at least one of the number of successfully completed transactions involving the seller and the number of disputed problems associated with transactions involving the seller; and

10 seller offer data indicating at least one service offered for sale and an availability record for the service;  
a program store storing processor implementable instructions; and  
a processor coupled to the data store and to the program store for implementing the stored instructions; wherein the stored instructions comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:  
15 implement a buyer interface to receive a purchase inquiry from a buyer, the purchase inquiry comprising a plurality of purchase criteria;  
output seller offer data for a plurality of sellers able to meet the purchase criteria; and  
receive a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a transaction;  
20 wherein the data store is further for storing transaction data comprising, for each of a plurality of transactions, a transaction identifier, a transaction status, a buyer identifier and a seller identifier;  
wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to implement a problem report interface to receive a problem report for a problem associated with a transaction;  
and wherein the data store is further for storing problem data comprising, for each of a plurality of 25 problems associated with transactions, a problem identifier, a transaction identifier and a problem report received by the problem report interface.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the plurality of purchase criteria include a service requirement and a date and time range requirement for the service.

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3. The system of claim 1 or 2, wherein the problem report interface is implemented to receive the problem report from a buyer and, at the request of the buyer, to create a replacement transaction for the buyer.

35 4. The system of claim 3, wherein the problem report interface is implemented to create a replacement transaction for the buyer by:  
receiving an updated purchase inquiry from the buyer, the purchase inquiry comprising a plurality of updated purchase criteria;  
outputting seller offer data for a plurality of sellers able to meet the updated purchase criteria; and

receiving a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a replacement transaction.

5. The system of claim 3 or 4, wherein the transaction data further comprises, for each of the plurality of transactions, a guaranteed or underwritten status, and wherein the problem report interface is further implemented to create a replacement transaction for the buyer in dependence on the guaranteed or underwritten status of the problem transaction.

10. The system of any one of claims 3 to 5, wherein the data store is further for storing seller extension data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers, a seller identifier and cancellation charging data, and wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to award compensation to the seller in dependence on the cancellation charging data for the seller.

15. The system of claim 6, wherein the data store is further for storing default cancellation charging data, and wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to award compensation to the seller in dependence on the default cancellation charging data if the seller extension data comprises no cancellation charging data for the seller.

20. The system of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the problem report interface is further implemented to receive the problem report from a seller and, at the request of the seller, update the seller data for the seller.

25. The system of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the data store is further for storing market specific language data comprising, for each of a plurality of market sectors, a market sector identifier and a plurality of generic market terms and corresponding specific market sector terms, and wherein the problem report interface is further implemented to translate between generic market terms and specific market sector terms using the market specific language data.

30. The system of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the problem report interface is implemented to receive the problem report at a time from the creation of the transaction.

11. The system of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the problem report interface is implemented to receive a problem report via at least one of a computer terminal and a telephone handset.

35. 12. The system of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the data store is further for storing alert data comprising, for each of a plurality of alerts, an alert identifier, an alert status and a description of a known problem, and wherein the problem report interface is further implemented to notify the buyer or seller of alert data which is relevant to the problem.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the problem report interface is further implemented to receive an indication of whether the problem will affect other transactions as part of the problem report.

5 14. The system of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the problem report interface is further implemented to receive an indication of liability for the problem as a part of the problem report, the indication being one of the buyer, the seller and a third party.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:

10 implement a dispute resolution interface if a problem report received from the buyer or seller indicates that the other is liable for the problem, thereby creating a disputed problem; and

update the problem data in the data store to cancel the problem if the buyer or seller indicates that they are liable for the problem, thereby resolving the problem.

15 16. The system of claim 15, wherein, in the case of a disputed problem, the dispute resolution interface is implemented to receive problem related information from the buyer and seller and to make the problem related information available to the buyer and seller.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the data store is further for storing dispute resolution data 20 comprising, for each of a plurality of disputed problems, a problem identifier and the problem related information.

18. The system of claim 16 or 17, wherein, in the case of a disputed problem, the dispute resolution interface is further implemented to enable the buyer and seller to enter into a time limited dispute resolution 25 dialogue, and wherein the problem data in the data store is updated to cancel the problem if the dispute resolution dialogue resolves the problem within the time limit.

19. The system of any one of claims 16 to 18, wherein, in the case of a disputed problem, the dispute resolution interface is further implemented to enable the buyer or seller to refer the problem to an arbitrator, 30 and wherein the arbitrator determines liability.

20. The system of any one of claims 15 to 19, wherein, in the case of a disputed problem, the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to automatically refer a disputed problem to an arbitrator, wherein the decision to refer a disputed problem to an arbitrator is dependent on at 35 least one of:

- the number of transactions affected by the disputed problem;
- a guaranteed or underwritten status;
- the presence of a widespread contractual ambiguity requiring clarification; and
- a grade of at least one of the buyer and seller; and

40 wherein the arbitrator determines liability.

21. The system of claim 19 or 20, wherein the data store is further for storing arbitrator data comprising a list of arbitrators, and wherein the arbitrator is selected from the list.

5 22. The system of any one of claims 19 to 21, wherein, in the case of a disputed problem, the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:

implement an arbitrator interface to receive a judgement from the arbitrator, the judgement comprising an indication of liability; and

notify the buyer and the seller of the judgement received from the arbitrator.

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23. The system of claim 22, wherein the data store is further for storing case law data comprising a plurality of judgements for disputed problems and problem related information for the problems.

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24. The system of claim 23, wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to provide relevant case law data to buyers, sellers and arbitrators.

25. The system of claim 13, wherein the problem report interface is further implemented to receive an indication of the characteristics of other transactions which will be affected by the problem as part of the problem report.

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26. The system of claim 25, wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:

determine the other transactions which will be affected by the problem on the basis of the problem report; and

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notify buyers and sellers of the other affected transaction of the problem.

27. The system of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the seller grade is further dependant on stored data relating to problem transactions.

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28. The system of claim 27, wherein the stored data relating to problem transactions comprises a measure of how early the seller has submitted problem reports for problems associated with their transactions for which they accept liability.

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29. The system of claim 27 or 28 when dependent on claim 15, wherein the stored data relating to problem transactions comprises a measure of the number of disputed problems associated with the transactions of the seller.

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30. The system of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the data store is further for storing buyer data comprising, for each of a plurality of buyers, a buyer identifier and a buyer grade, and wherein the buyer grade for each buyer is dependant on stored data relating to problem transactions.

31. The system of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to generate a contract between the buyer and the seller of a transaction, the terms of the contract depending on at least one of a buyer grade and a seller grade of the  
5 buyer and seller respectively.

32. A transaction management system for managing the purchase of an item and/or service by a buyer from a seller, the system comprising:

10 a data store for storing seller data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers, a seller identifier;  
a program store storing processor implementable instructions; and  
a processor coupled to the data store and to the program store for implementing the stored instructions; wherein the stored instructions comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:

implement a buyer interface to receive a purchase inquiry from a buyer;

output seller offer data for a plurality of sellers; and

15 receive a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a transaction;

wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to implement a problem report interface to receive a problem report for a problem associated with a transaction, and wherein the seller data in the data store further comprises, for each of the plurality of sellers, a seller  
20 grade, wherein the seller grade is dependent on a measure of how early the seller has submitted problem reports for problems associated with their transactions for which they accept liability.

33. A transaction management system for managing the purchase of an item and/or service by a buyer from a seller, the system comprising:

25 a data store for storing seller data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers, a seller identifier;  
a program store storing processor implementable instructions; and  
a processor coupled to the data store and to the program store for implementing the stored instructions; wherein the stored instructions comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:

implement a buyer interface to receive a purchase inquiry from a buyer;

30 output seller offer data for a plurality of sellers; and  
receive a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a transaction;

wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:

35 implement a problem report interface to receive a problem report from the buyer or seller for a problem associated with a transaction, the problem report including an indication of liability for the problem;

implement a dispute resolution interface if a problem report received from the buyer or seller indicates that the other is liable for the problem, thereby creating a disputed problem; and

40 automatically refer a disputed problem to an arbitrator, the decision to refer a disputed problem to an arbitrator being dependent on at least one of:

the number of transactions affected by the disputed problem;  
a guaranteed or underwritten status;  
the presence of a widespread contractual ambiguity requiring clarification; and  
a grade of at least one of the buyer and seller,

5 wherein the arbitrator determines liability.

34. A transaction management system for managing the purchase of an item and/or service by a buyer from a seller, the system comprising:

a data store for storing seller data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers, a seller identifier;

10 a program store storing processor implementable instructions; and

a processor coupled to the data store and to the program store for implementing the stored instructions; wherein the stored instructions comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:

implement a buyer interface to receive a purchase inquiry from a buyer;

output seller offer data for a plurality of sellers; and

15 receive a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a transaction;

wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:

implement a problem report interface to receive a problem report from the buyer or seller for a problem associated with a transaction and inform the buyer or seller of known problems which are relevant to the transaction;

request and receive further information about the problem from other buyers and sellers;

and

notify other buyers and sellers of the problem.

25 35. A transaction management system for managing the purchase of an item and/or service by a buyer from a seller, the system comprising:

a data store for storing seller data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers, a seller identifier;

a program store storing processor implementable instructions; and

30 a processor coupled to the data store and to the program store for implementing the stored instructions; wherein the stored instructions comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:

implement a buyer interface to receive a purchase inquiry from a buyer;

output seller offer data for a plurality of sellers; and

receive a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a transaction;

35 wherein the stored instructions further comprise instructions for controlling the processor to:

implement a problem report interface to receive a problem report from the buyer or seller for a problem associated with a transaction, the problem report including an indication of liability for the problem;

implement a dispute resolution interface if a problem report received from the buyer or seller indicates that the other is liable for the problem, wherein the dispute resolution interface is implemented to:

enable the buyer and seller to enter into a time limited dispute resolution dialogue;  
5 and  
provide the buyer and seller with stored information about relevant transactions and the dispute resolution dialogue.

36. A method for managing the purchase of a service by a buyer from a seller, the method comprising:

10 storing in a data store seller data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers:  
a seller identifier;  
a seller grade dependent on at least one of the number of successfully completed transactions involving the seller and the number of disputed problems associated with transactions involving the seller; and  
15 seller offer data indicating at least one service offered for sale and an availability record for the service;  
implementing a buyer interface to receive a purchase inquiry from a buyer, the purchase inquiry comprising a plurality of purchase criteria;  
outputting seller offer data for a plurality of sellers able to meet the purchase criteria; and  
20 receiving a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a transaction;  
further storing in the data store transaction data comprising, for each of a plurality of transactions, a transaction identifier, a transaction status, a buyer identifier and a seller identifier;  
implementing a problem report interface to receive a problem report for a problem associated with a transaction;  
25 further storing in the data store problem data comprising, for each of a plurality of problems associated with transactions, a problem identifier, a transaction identifier and a problem report received by the problem report interface.

37. The method of claim 36, wherein the plurality of purchase criteria include a service requirement and  
30 a date and time range requirement for the service.

38. The method of claim 36 or 37, wherein implementing the problem report interface comprises receiving the problem report from a buyer and, at the request of the buyer, creating a replacement transaction for the buyer.

35 39. The method of claim 38, wherein the implementing the problem report interface further comprises:  
receiving an updated purchase inquiry from the buyer, the purchase inquiry comprising a plurality of updated purchase criteria;  
outputting seller offer data for a plurality of sellers able to meet the updated purchase criteria; and

receiving a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a replacement transaction.

40. The method of claim 38 or 39, wherein the transaction data further comprises, for each of the 5 plurality of transactions, a guaranteed or underwritten status, and wherein implementing the problem report interface further comprises creating a replacement transaction for the buyer in dependence on the guaranteed or underwritten status of the problem transaction.

41. The method of any one of claims 38 to 40, further comprising:

10 storing in the data store seller extension data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers, a seller identifier and cancellation charging data; and  
awarding compensation to the seller in dependence on the cancellation charging data for the seller.

42. The method of claim 41, further comprising:

15 storing in the data store default cancellation charging data; and  
awarding compensation to the seller in dependence on the default cancellation charging data if the seller extension data comprises no cancellation charging data for the seller.

43. The method of any one of the preceding claims, wherein implementing the problem report interface 20 further comprises receiving the problem report from a seller and, at the request of the seller, updating the seller data for the seller.

44. The method of any one of the preceding claims, further comprising:

25 storing market specific language data comprising, for each of a plurality of market sectors, a market sector identifier and a plurality of generic market terms and corresponding specific market sector terms, and  
translating between generic market terms and specific market sector terms using the market specific language data.

45. The method of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the problem report is received at a time 30 from the creation of the transaction.

46. The method of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the problem report is received via at least one of a computer terminal and a telephone handset.

35 47. The method of any one of the preceding claims, further comprising:

storing in the data store alert data comprising, for each of a plurality of alerts, an alert identifier, an alert status and a description of a known problem; and  
notifying the buyer or seller of alert data which is relevant to the problem.

48. The method of claim 47, wherein implementing the problem report interface further comprises receiving an indication of whether the problem will affect other transactions as part of the problem report.

49. The method of any one of the preceding claims, wherein implementing the problem report interface further comprises receiving an indication of liability for the problem as a part of the problem report, the indication being one of the buyer, the seller and a third party.

50. The method of claim 49, further comprising:

10 implementing a dispute resolution interface if a problem report received from the buyer or seller indicates that the other is liable for the problem, thereby creating a disputed problem; and  
updating the problem data in the data store to cancel the problem if the buyer or seller indicates that they are liable for the problem, thereby resolving the problem.

51. The method of claim 50, wherein, in the case of a disputed problem, implementing the dispute resolution interface comprises receiving problem related information from the buyer and seller and making the problem related information available to the buyer and seller.

52. The method of claim 51, further comprising storing in the data store dispute resolution data comprising, for each of a plurality of disputed problems, a problem identifier and the problem related information.

53. The method of claim 51 or 52, wherein, in the case of a disputed problem, implementing the dispute resolution interface comprises enabling the buyer and seller to enter into a time limited dispute resolution dialogue, and wherein the method further comprises updating the problem data in the data store to cancel the problem if the dispute resolution dialogue resolves the problem within the time limit.

54. The method of any one of claims 51 to 53, wherein, in the case of a disputed problem, the dispute resolution interface comprises enabling the buyer or seller to refer the problem to an arbitrator, the arbitrator determining liability.

30 55. The method of any one of claims 50 to 54, further comprising, in the case of a disputed problem, automatically referring a disputed problem to an arbitrator, the decision to refer a disputed problem to an arbitrator being dependent on at least one of:

35 the number of transactions affected by the disputed problem;  
a guaranteed or underwritten status;  
the presence of a widespread contractual ambiguity requiring clarification; and  
a grade of at least one of the buyer and seller; and  
wherein the arbitrator determines liability.

56. The method of claim 54 or 55, further comprising storing in the data store arbitrator data comprising a list of arbitrators, the arbitrator being selected from the list.

5 57. The method of any one of claims 54 to 56, further comprising, in the case of a disputed problem:  
implementing an arbitrator interface to receive a judgement from the arbitrator, the judgement comprising an indication of liability; and  
notifying the buyer and the seller of the judgement received from the arbitrator.

10 58. The method of claim 57, further comprising storing in the data store case law data comprising a plurality of judgements for disputed problems and problem related information for the problems.

59. The method of claim 58, further comprising controlling the processor to provide relevant case law data to buyers, sellers and arbitrators.

15 60. The method of claim 48, further comprising receiving an indication of the characteristics of other transactions which will be affected by the problem as part of the problem report.

20 61. The method of claim 60, further comprising determining the other transactions which will be affected by the problem on the basis of the problem report, and notifying buyers and sellers of the other affected transaction of the problem.

62. The method of any one of the preceding claims, wherein the seller grade is further dependant on stored data relating to problem transactions.

25 63. The method of claim 62, wherein the stored data relating to problem transactions comprises a measure of how early the seller has submitted problem reports for problems associated with their transactions for which they accept liability.

30 64. The method of claim 62 or 63 when dependent on claim 50, wherein the stored data relating to problem transactions comprises a measure of the number of disputed problems associated with the transactions of the seller.

35 65. The method of any one of the preceding claims, further comprising storing in the data store buyer data comprising, for each of a plurality of buyers, a buyer identifier and a buyer grade, the buyer grade for each buyer being dependant on stored data relating to problem transactions.

66. The method of any one of the preceding claims, further comprising generating a contract between the buyer and the seller of a transaction, the terms of the contract depending on at least one of a buyer grade and a seller grade of the buyer and seller respectively.

67. A method for managing the purchase of an item and/or service by a buyer from a seller, the method comprising:

storing in a data store seller data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers, a seller identifier;

implementing a buyer interface to receive a purchase inquiry from a buyer;

5 outputting seller offer data for a plurality of sellers;

receiving a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a transaction;

and

implementing a problem report interface to receive a problem report for a problem associated with a transaction,

10 wherein the seller data further comprises, for each of the plurality of sellers, a seller grade, wherein the seller grade is dependent on a measure of how early the seller has submitted problem reports for problems associated with their transactions for which they accept liability.

68. A method for managing the purchase of an item and/or service by a buyer from a seller, the method

15 comprising:

storing in a data store seller data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers, a seller identifier;

implementing a buyer interface to receive a purchase inquiry from a buyer;

outputting seller offer data for a plurality of sellers;

receiving a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a transaction;

20 implementing a problem report interface to receive a problem report from a buyer or seller for a problem associated with a transaction, the problem report including an indication of liability for the problem;

implementing a dispute resolution interface if a problem report received from the buyer or seller indicates that the other is liable for the problem, thereby creating a disputed problem; and

25 automatically referring a disputed problem to an arbitrator, the decision to refer a disputed problem to an arbitrator being dependent on at least one of:

the number of transactions affected by the disputed problem;

a guaranteed or underwritten status;

the presence of a widespread contractual ambiguity requiring clarification; and

a grade of at least one of the buyer and seller,

30 wherein the arbitrator determines liability.

69. A method for managing the purchase of an item and/or service by a buyer from a seller, the method comprising:

storing in a data store seller data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers, a seller identifier;

35 implementing a buyer interface to receive a purchase inquiry from a buyer;

outputting seller offer data for a plurality of sellers;

receiving a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a transaction;

39 implementing a problem report interface to receive a problem report from a buyer or seller for a problem associated with a transaction and inform the buyer or seller of known problems which are relevant to the transaction;

requesting and receiving further information about the problem from other buyers and sellers; and  
notifying other buyers and sellers of the problem.

70. A method for managing the purchase of an item and/or service by a buyer from a seller, the method

5 comprising:

storing in a data store seller data comprising, for each of a plurality of sellers, a seller identifier;

implementing a buyer interface to receive a purchase inquiry from a buyer;

outputting seller offer data for a plurality of sellers;

receiving a purchase request from the buyer accepting a said offer, thereby creating a transaction;

10 implementing a problem report interface to receive a problem report from a buyer or seller for a problem associated with a transaction, the problem report including an indication of liability for the problem; and

15 implementing a dispute resolution interface if a problem report received from the buyer or seller indicates that the other is liable for the problem, wherein implementing the dispute resolution interface

comprises:

enabling the buyer and seller to enter into a time limited dispute resolution dialogue; and

providing the buyer and seller with stored information about relevant transactions and the dispute resolution dialogue.

20 71. A computer software product arranged to cause a computer to execute the method of any one of claims 36 to 70.

72. A computer readable recording medium having encoded thereon at least one program for performing the method of any one of claims 36 to 70.